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Playing Their Cards Right: Ethnic Parties and Government Coalitions in Post-Communist Europe

SERGIU GHERGHINA
Goethe University Frankfurt

GEORGE JIGLĂU
Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca

This article seeks to identify the determinants of ethnic parties' access to coalition governments in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia between 1990 and 2013. We conduct a cross-national and longitudinal analysis in which we take into account all the elections in which the ethnic parties gained parliamentary representation. With 21 cases over two decades – with the party at the election being the unit of analysis – and Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) as the method of analysis, this study concludes that the pivotal position is important for access to government coalitions, while organizational change and government incumbency have a limited explanatory power.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary democracies with a proportional representation component, it is rare that the election winner obtains sufficient votes to govern alone. Most often, the largest parliamentary party has the opportunity to form a government coalition and thus invites aboard a few partners. Scholars of coalition formation have frequently tried to explain which parties get into government and to identify the determinants of their participation.¹ While the presence of mainstream and niche ideological parties in government is often determined by their policy positions or size, the ethnic parties display different features that make them suitable as coalition partners. By combining features of classic political parties and interest groups receiving support from ethnic minorities,² the ethnic parties display a strong continuity on the political scene, have relatively stable electorates, and show ideological flexibility. In the absence of a universalistic program, they do not pursue the expansion of their supporters and voters but appeal instead to particular ethnic groups and strive to mobilize voters belonging to these groups.³ In doing so, they use an in-group catch-all discourse in which the ideology is considerably loosened.

Thus, despite their small size, ethnic parties are stable political actors available to participate in coalition governments. While many Western European ethnic parties have a low propensity to seek representation in the central government, post-communist ethnic parties are willing to become a governmental partner. Such an attitude originates in their belief that minorities' interests are best pursued when in office. These features gain increased relevance in the post-communist region where electoral volatility is high, consecutive elections are rarely won by the same party, and the number of entries or exits from the party system is generally high.⁴ Consequently, we may expect ethnic parties to become a familiar presence in

Address correspondence to Sergiu Gherghina, Department of Political Science, Goethe University Frankfurt, Theodor-W.-Adorno-Platz 6, PEG 3G.001, 60323 Frankfurt am Main, Germany. E-mail: gherghina@soz.uni-frankfurt.de

Eastern European government coalitions. In reality, there is great variation: when looking at Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia – three countries with relevant ethnic minorities and intense dynamic on their coalition formation – out of 21 times when the ethnic parties gained seats in the legislature, they got only in less than half (10) seats in the cabinet. Why is this the case?

To solve this empirical puzzle our article seeks to identify the party-level determinants of ethnic parties' inclusion in coalition governments. We conduct a cross-national and longitudinal analysis in which we take into account all the elections in which ethnic parties gained parliamentary representation (the reserved seats are excluded). The unit of analysis is the party in the election (21 cases) and our aim is to explain both inter- and intra-country variation; accordingly, national level determinants (e.g. the electoral system, degree of democratization) are not included. We use Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to map out the effects of organizational and electoral variables on the inclusion of ethnic parties in government coalitions. Understanding under what conditions ethnic parties are included in coalition governments carries theoretical importance. Their participation in cabinets can moderate their discourse and thus better accommodate inter-ethnic relations in society. The key findings illustrate that the existence of a pivotal position can drive the ethnic parties into government. The QCA-based methodological design allows us to move from classical unidirectional explanations provided by the existing literature and isolate the pivotal position as the crucial condition that explains the inclusion of ethnic parties in coalition government after an analysis that considers other plausible factors as well. The narrative part of the analysis explains the mechanisms that allow us to reach this particular conclusion, adding context-based explanations to the QCA analysis.

The article starts with a theoretical and conceptual framework on ethnic parties and formulates four testable hypotheses. We then provide details about the case selection, explain the method, and operationalize the variables. The third section identifies the determinants of ethnic parties' absence from coalition governments. Finally, we outline the main findings and discuss avenues for further research.

THE ROAD TO GOVERNMENT COALITIONS

There is general consensus that ethnic parties follow a different logic from parties with mass appeal. The functions of interest channeling, aggregation and representation are pursued by ethnic parties only relative to regional or ethnic groups.⁵ Ethnic parties give voice to ethnic political claims and are institutional means to pursue ethnic goals.⁶ Ethnic parties portray themselves as the representatives of particular groups from which they seek (and are dependent on) electoral support. Accordingly, they do not seek vote maximization, but rather constant support.⁷

The role of ethnic parties in democratic societies is controversial and scholars disagree over their positive or negative impact in society. Moving beyond this debate, there are pragmatic reasons for which ethnic parties in Eastern Europe are willing to join the government. Such a position provides access to decision making. The representation and pursuit of minority interests (especially in those cases when the territorial concentration is an issue) is maximized when ethnic parties gain a central state voice. Accordingly, the government has an instrumental function that allows these parties to fulfill their goals. While it is true that the demographic variation of ethnic groups in Eastern Europe might produce local goals and strategies within the minority groups⁸, all these are consistent with the state-level goals pursued by ethnic parties.

The ethnic parties have specific features that make them appeal to most mainstream parties when forming a government: they have a stable electorate and they are ideologically

flexible. First, previous research has indicated high levels of electoral volatility (vote shifts between consecutive elections) over time and countries throughout the entire post-communist region, both in absolute terms and relative to that of Western European countries.⁹ As a result, there are numerous entries into and exits from the political scene. Out of the few hundred parties competing in elections over the past two decades, approximately one tenth have sustained a continuous presence in the legislature. Ethnic parties are different: given their ability to encapsulate the voting preferences of minorities, they are among the least volatile in Eastern Europe, with a homogenous electorate, and the competitors best able to mobilize a stable core of voters across time.¹⁰ This feature diminishes the risk of exits from the political arena, fosters a continuous presence in parliament, and makes them available partners for many *formateurs* – with the exception of radical right parties – in deciding the composition of a government coalition.

Second, ethnic parties do not have easily identifiable profiles ideologically speaking compared to other parties. Instead, ethnic parties include a broad range of issues addressing the specific needs of the minorities (e.g. collective rights, territorial or cultural autonomy, limited repressive capacity of the state). Social issues and views on ethnic minority rights form a complex dimension of preferences that have to be pursued and represented.¹¹ Ethnic parties position themselves either closer to the ideological median or more to the extremes – when outbidding occurs – relative to the opinions of the minority groups. The pursuit of group policies and the absence of clear stances on the general ideological spectrum lead to a high degree of ideological flexibility. Empirically, this can be observed in the election manifestos of Eastern European ethnic parties. Given this flexibility, the ethnic parties are open to collaboration with both left- and right-wing parties, especially when the two sides of the political spectrum are much more nuanced and different, like in Eastern Europe compared to the established Western European systems.¹² Accordingly, ethnic parties can cohabit with almost every party taking the leading role in putting together a government; the prospects for governmental conflict are minimized, as the ideological proximity is not a salient issue at stake.

Following these arguments, the constant advantages of political continuity and flexible ideology are likely to favor the presence of ethnic parties in government coalitions. We argue that this expectation is met as long as these advantages are perceived by the other parties. In this sense, four variables are of great importance to reflect continuity (as political organization, in office and on the political arena) and flexibility: the organizational change, the pivotal role, incumbency, and involvement in ethnic disputes. For reasons of simplicity we formulate a linear effect for each of these variables but the theoretical perspectives indicate that their interaction (a configuration of variables) is likely to provide a better explanation of the presence in coalitions. To begin with, the party organization is a broad concept used to denominate a conglomerate of internal structures and procedures such as party units, membership, allocation of resources (e.g. power, finances), decision making, elite behavior (e.g. unity, leadership continuity), and organizational autonomy.¹³ Organizations form the core of most political parties and ensure their functioning and communication with voters. Organizational change endangers the image of the ethnic party as a unified actor in the political struggles, including the negotiations for government formation. One indicator of this instability is the organizational fragmentation of the party (splits). Rooted in the effects of ethnic outbidding within a minority group,¹⁴ fragmentation may occur both at the group and party level. Focusing on the latter, the organizational fragmentation is detrimental to the ethnic party in its attempts to secure government seats. A split usually leads to a shattering of the electorate and weakens its mobilization potential. Accordingly, the ethnic party is less likely to represent a solid partner for the *formateur*.

Another indicator of organizational change is the party merger or fusion. Mergers are usually strategic: they target either the maximization of legislative seats¹⁵ or the avoidance of electoral oblivion.¹⁶ A merger does not necessarily guarantee larger electoral support within the minority group but may send a message of instability and raise the question of duration. Given the profile and appeal to a specific target group, mergers can weaken the discourse of ethnic parties and diminish the advantage of electoral stability. In this article, we also subsume to this causal condition the membership of an ethnic party in an ethnic electoral alliance – a coalition of at least two ethnic parties representing the same ethnic group formed in order to maximize the chances of these parties gaining seats. We consider this as a “temporary” merger.

The leadership is a vital component in the life of any organization. The three “faces” of parties clearly outline the key roles of the central office and of the national leadership within a political party.¹⁷ Leadership continuity is increasingly relevant in the context of accumulated influence gained by contemporary party leaders and for the relations established by parties with voters.¹⁸ The linkage with voters can take place through direct communication initiated by party leaders who can contribute to the creation of a recognizable label for political parties.¹⁹ This argument matches the stable ethnic voting amongst the minorities that is mainly fueled by ethnic socialization through information shortcuts. The most important source of political learning for ethnic voters is the leaders of their own ethnic group.²⁰ To sum up, organizational changes in the form of splits, mergers, the formation of temporary electoral alliances, or leadership changes are likely to shed a negative light on the perceived stability of ethnic parties and thus diminish their appeal to possible coalition partners.²¹ Accordingly, we hypothesize that the absence of organizational change is likely to enhance the participation of ethnic parties in government coalitions (H1).

In theory, the ability of ethnic parties to form coalitions with political actors situated on both sides of the center enhances their presence in government coalitions. However, the leverage provided by the ideological flexibility is not straightforward in post-communist countries and earlier studies have shown that ideology has a marginal impact on coalition formation.²² Under these circumstances, the participation of ethnic parties in government may occur only when they are necessary. The pivotal position means holding the balance of power between the main political parties or combinations of parties and provides strong bargaining advantages: prior to government formation, pivotal parties are those that can turn to either side to generate a winning coalition. Since coalition formulae do not follow a clear-cut logic within the ideological space in Eastern Europe, ethnic parties can end up being indispensable for coalition formation. Consequently, when ethnic parties have a pivotal position they are more likely to receive a position in government (H2).

Incumbency (e.g. presence in government at the moment of election) may also impact the participation of ethnic parties in government coalitions. In general, political parties in government are directly affected by retrospective evaluations that are transformed into punishment or reward-based behavior on the part of voters.²³ In spite of their lower level of experience in elections, these mechanisms are also at work in the new democratic post-communist countries²⁴ where government incumbency is a source of electoral volatility.²⁵ Therefore, ethnic parties that are not incumbent are likely to have a presence in government coalitions (H3).

Previous research has shown that in the post-communist countries ethnic conflict can lead to political mobilization under specific circumstances.²⁶ This happens for two reasons related to the constructive role of ethnic parties in promoting inter-group accommodation. First, following the arguments of the consociational scholars, these ethnic parties help dampen conflict by channeling demands and representing the interests of the minority groups.²⁷ Their presence in the legislature or executive may have a positive impact on the democratic

consolidation. Second, societal issues related to the ethnic group increase the importance of ethnic parties. Some of these issues can develop into sources of conflict between the majority and minorities. This is particularly the case for territorially concentrated minorities, which are more prone to protest.²⁸ Ethnic parties can facilitate the integration of these issues into the political debates and thus diminish the risk of a conflict. The visibility and importance of the ethnic party grows with its capacity to make use of problematic situations; their presence in government is less desirable in a calm environment in which ethnic parties do not play a relevant role. Consequently, the involvement in ethnic issues prior to elections may foster ethnic parties' participation in government (H4).

CASE SELECTION AND METHODOLOGY

Our analysis focuses on the causes of ethnic parties' access to government coalitions between 1990 and 2013 in three post-communist countries: Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia. The three countries were selected on the basis of having the most similar system design: they had relevant ethnic minorities that formed at least one ethnic party or political organization to compete in legislative elections (reserved seats were excluded from the analysis), a similar capacity of ethnic parties to participate in electoral competition (e.g. share of minorities above the threshold of relevance²⁹), and a similar process of government formation. For this latter reason we did not include Latvia or Estonia in this study, since no Russian (or pro-Russian) party was included in a governing coalition during our timeframe. Moreover, none of these countries was involved in a major armed ethnic conflict, requiring the intervention of foreign states (which led to the exclusion of Macedonia from this study). Since our study is conducted at party level, in each of these countries we selected only those elections in which at least one ethnic party representing a relevant minority gained seats in the national legislature (or the lower chamber for bicameral parliaments). Consequently, we analyze eight elections in Bulgaria, seven in Romania, and six in Slovakia. The ethnic parties and corresponding elections included in the analysis are the following: *Uniunea Democrata a Magharilor din Romania* (UDMR) (1990, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012), *Dvizhenie za prava i svobodi* (DPS) (1990, 1991, 1994, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009 and 2013) in Bulgaria, and *Strana mad'arskej koalície* (SMK) (1994, 1998, 2002 and 2006) and *Most-Hid* (2010 and 2012) in Slovakia.

Along the lines of the theoretical issues, a relatively low number of cases, and the type of data we use Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). Based on Boolean algebra and set theory, QCA relies on dichotomous variables, logical operations between variables (causal conditions and outcomes in QCA terminology), logical operators (AND, OR and NON) and truth tables.³⁰ The use of QCA allows a case-oriented approach and requires good case knowledge to explain the linkage between the theory, the cases (the reality on the ground), and the findings of the analysis. In addition, QCA reveals the interaction effects between the causal conditions included in the model and illustrates the cases associated with them.³¹ Throughout the analysis we use the QCA specific language. The outcome is what we usually call the dependent variable, while the causal conditions are the determinants (independent variables).

Two technical issues deserve close attention. First, we label each variable with a single letter; for simplicity, we use the alphabetical order for the independent variables in hypotheses 1-4 (A to D) and S for outcome (i.e. the success to enter a coalition government). In QCA, using a capital letter indicates the presence of a causal condition, whereas lowercase letters imply the absence of the causal condition ('A' vs. 'a'). The presence of any variable (condition or outcome) is coded 1, whereas the absence is coded 0. Second, QCA uses logical

operators—AND, OR and NON. AND is represented in an expression by the sign ‘*’ (e.g. ‘A*B’) or by simply putting the two letters labeling the variables next to each other (e.g. ‘AB’). OR is represented by the sign ‘+’ (e.g. ‘A+B’). NON is represented by using the lower case letter. Consequently, a proposition in QCA links the causal combination or a reunion of causal combinations and an outcome. If AB is a causal combination associated with S (the outcome), the solution formula is ‘AB → S’. However, this is only a logical relationship and should not automatically be associated with the existence of causality. A causal link between the term(s) on the two sides of ‘→’ is established on the basis of theory and empirical evidence that the observed relationship is actually taking place, the term(s) on the left side of the proposition are actually cause(s) for the outcome, and the relationship is not a pure coincidence.³² The outcome is easy to dichotomize (for variable operationalization, see Appendix 1): it is present when the ethnic party joins the government coalition and absent when it fails to do so.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

As a first step, we test for the necessity (reflected in the consistency score) and sufficiency (reflected in the coverage score) of each causal condition (conducted for both the occurrence and the absence of the outcome). Following Carsten Schneider and Bernard Grofman, we consider a condition to be necessary or, respectively, sufficient if the two scores are above the 0.9 threshold. The results in Table 1 indicate that the pivotal position (condition B) stands out for both the presence in and absence from government coalitions. A pivotal position appears as necessary for the inclusion of ethnic parties in governing coalitions in 90% (for a consistency score of 0.9) of the combinations associated with this outcome. Moreover, it is sufficient: whenever it appears in a combination, this outcome occurs (the corresponding coverage score is 1). At the same time, when the ethnic parties are in opposition the pivotal position never appears in combinations (B has a consistency score and a coverage score of 0). The absence of a pivotal role is necessary when ethnic parties are left in opposition and appears in all the combinations associated with it (B has a consistency score of 1 and coverage score of 0.91).

Table 1 about here

While the findings of the necessity analysis reflect the importance of the ethnic parties’ pivotal status, they are not sufficient to reaching conclusions. If a condition is necessary, it does not mean that it leads to a particular outcome by itself. It may appear in combination with one or several other causal conditions and be present in several different causal expressions, with each of them representing different “paths” towards the outcome and each of them being sufficient but not necessary. Also, if one condition is sufficient, it does not mean that it is the only sufficient condition for the outcome; there can be other combinations of conditions that are also sufficient “paths” for the outcome. Consequently, we seek to identify these combinations and analyze the cases in which ethnic parties are present in government. Out of the 10 cases belonging to this category, one (UDMR after the 1996 elections in Romania) displays a contradictory combination and will be dropped,³³ leaving nine cases for analysis.

When Are Ethnic Parties in Government?

Table 2 confirms earlier observations and indicates that all three expressions in the solution formula (first column) include the presence of the pivotal position. The combination of organizational changes, a pivotal position, and opposition status is associated with four cases, two from Bulgaria and two from Slovakia. The 2001 elections in Bulgaria witnessed the emergence of the National Movement - Simeon II, a new right wing party led by the former Bulgarian king. It won the election but failed short of an absolute majority. DPS was previously in opposition to the government led by the Union for Democratic Forces (SDS) and was included in the government to secure a majority. The other two options were the SDS, drastically sanctioned by the electorate, or a Socialist-led coalition. Simeon II's choice for DPS could also be explained in terms of ideological proximity since both parties declared themselves as liberal. The 2013 elections followed weeks of nation-wide protests against the government led by the center-right Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB). GERB won the early elections with 30.5% of the votes, followed by a Socialist-led coalition, DPS and the radical right anti-minority party Ataka. GERB was unable to convince any party to form a coalition, so the Socialists joined forces with DPS, which was the only possible solution to exclude GERB and Ataka. The coalition had only 120 seats (out of 240) but benefitted from the defection of some Ataka and GERB parliamentarians for the vote of confidence. DPS was previously in opposition to GERB; the Socialists argued that a coalition with the Turkish ethnic party would respond to the population's desire for change.

The 2010 elections in Slovakia came after the split within SMK, a party that had been the traditional political voice of the Hungarian minority since the early 1990s.³⁴ The splinter group named itself Most-Hid ("bridge" in Slovak and Hungarian) and presented itself as moderate, while SMK kept the label, dominated by less moderate politicians. In 2010, SMK failed to pass the 5% threshold, while Most-Hid managed to gain seats in its first electoral competition (almost 9% of the votes). The incumbent Smer won the elections but did not hold a majority. Its only potential partner was its older ally, the Slovak National Party (SNS), but this would still leave it short of a majority. Eventually, a coalition of the four moderate right-wing parties, including Most-Hid, was formed, representing the only possibility to exclude Smer and the radical right.

Table 2 about here

The combination of no organizational changes, a pivotal position, and incumbency (aBC) is associated with four cases. These cases have in common the time dimension: all three countries were at the moment of elections in crucial stages of their negotiations for EU accession. A coalition including extremist parties would have been unthinkable on the road to European accession. As the combination of the three causal conditions shows, all four ethnic parties covered by these cases were incumbent and their continuation in government was presented as an indicator of stable inter-ethnic relations.

Two of these are in Romania where the 2000 elections marked the return to power of the Social Democrats (PSD), after four years of unstable coalition governments. A successor of the former Communist Party, the PSD was not inclined to cooperate with the UDMR during its 1990-1996 terms in office, opting instead for a close relationship with nationalist parties (e.g. the Red Quadrilateral). In 2000 the PSD was a more pragmatic party with stronger commitment towards Romania's road towards the EU and NATO accession. After winning the elections, but falling short of a parliamentary majority, the PSD could either form a coalition with its older ally, the nationalistic and anti-Hungarian Greater Romania Party, or with the UDMR. Eventually, the PSD asked for the silent support of UDMR, i.e. a vote in Parliament but no ministers. In 2004, the Romanian elections generated a tight result with the incumbent PSD and the "Truth and Justice" alliance formed in opposition by the Liberals

(PNL) and the Democrats (PD) gaining over 30% of the votes. The UDMR was approached and negotiated with both sides, first committing to a coalition with the PSD but then switching sides and forming a government with the PNL-PD alliance.

The same combination of causal conditions also explains the inclusion in the government of the DPS after the 2005 Bulgarian elections and, respectively, the inclusion of the SMK after the 2002 elections in Slovakia. The Bulgarian case is a compelling one, as the DPS was the party that led the talks for the formation of a coalition.³⁵ The political turmoil that followed the 2005 elections could only be solved by the creation of such a broad coalition among the main contenders; if the DPS had failed to reach a consensus, the mandate for the formation of the government would have been passed to the fourth party (Ataka). The 2002 elections in Slovakia also resulted in a highly fragmented parliament, with the populist and anti-minority Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) led by Vladimir Meciar winning the elections with only 19.5% of the votes. The right-wing incumbent Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda kept the agreement with the SMK and was supported by two other smaller parties, i.e. all the non-anti-minority parties that gained seats.³⁶

The presence in the government of SMK in Slovakia after the 1998 elections is explained by two combinations: the ABc explained above and the combination of a pivotal position, opposition status and the involvement in inter-ethnic issues before the elections (BcD). This combination provides a better contextual explanation for the case. The 1998 elections marked a turning point in post-communist Slovak politics because they were the first to leave the nationalist Meciar and his SNS allies in opposition. SMK was pivotal in the only possible reformist coalition that included all other five parties that gained seats and was led by the Christian Democrats. Before 1998, SMK was in opposition and was one of the most vocal opponents of Meciar's nationalist policies, hence its involvement in inter-ethnic disputes (D). Just as in Romania after the 1996 elections or Bulgaria in 2001, the inclusion of the established party representing the main national minority represented a step forward in the democratic consolidation and was also a signal to the EU that the country was prepared to commit to democratic reforms and move on with the accession.

The same combination explains DPS's presence in government after the 1991 elections in Bulgaria. The election was a competition between two large blocks: an alliance led by the incumbent Socialists (the successors of the Communist Party) and a reformist right-wing alliance, the Union for Democratic Forces (SDS). Both blocks were basically at the same level with a small advantage for the SDS (34% vs. 33%). Apart from them, DPS was the only party to pass the electoral threshold and basically could decide its partner. The year prior to the elections was marked by strong inter-ethnic tensions, with Turkish politicians constantly demanding more rights and accusing the ruling Socialists of discrimination (D). Under these circumstances, the government coalition including the SDS and DPS was quite natural.

These results indicate strong empirical support for Hypothesis 2: when ethnic parties held a pivotal position in a potential coalition, they were included in the government coalition. As our explanations pointed out, this happened under specific circumstances: the *formateur* was not an anti-minority party and the basic choice for coalition formation was between an anti-minority and an ethnic party. The latter choice was often embedded in the broader context of international pressure, i.e. EU accession. The importance of the pivotal condition is illustrated in Table 3 where this variable is the only explaining the presence in government coalitions.³⁷ There is mixed empirical evidence for Hypotheses 1 and 3 since organizational change and incumbency do not explain together the presence of ethnic parties in government coalitions. On the contrary, the presence of one combined with the absence of the other – to which we add the pivotal role – leads to this outcome. This is one reason for which none of the two conditions were present in Table 3. Finally, there is very weak empirical support for

Hypothesis 4: the involvement of ethnic parties in ethnic conflicts explains in combination with pivotal role and opposition status the presence in government in two out of nine instances.

Table 3 about here

Failing to Join Coalition Governments

Let us now turn to the 11 cases for which the outcome (government coalition) does not appear and ethnic parties end up in opposition.³⁸ The results in Table 4 indicate the existence of three combinations, the first combination being no organizational changes, no pivotal position, and involvement in ethnic issues (abD). The first two cases explained by this combination are in the 1990 elections in Romania and Bulgaria when successors of the communist parties won with substantial majorities. In Bulgaria, the Socialists won 211 of the 400 seats, while in Romania the National Salvation Front (FSN) won over 66% of the votes. There was no need for a coalition partner and the discourse of the DPS and the UDMR before the elections was regarded as radical by the winning parties. Moreover, in Romania the elections were scheduled only two months after the violent clashes between Romanians and Hungarians in a mid-sized city in Transylvania. In the 1992 Romanian elections, the third case explained by this combination, the context was fairly similar. The adoption of the first post-communist constitution in 1991 fueled the interethnic tensions (although they remained within the political arena), especially due to the first article that defined Romania as a nation-state. All of UDMR's relevant demands (e.g. the use of Hungarian in local administration in Transylvania) were rejected since the successor of the FSN did not gain a majority and took on board some nationalist parties towards the end of the term in office. The only possible coalition that would have excluded nationalistic parties could not reach a majority (hence the absence of the pivotal position for UDMR).

The failure of SMK to join the coalition government after the 2006 Slovak elections is also explained by this combination. After eight years of right-wing coalition government in which SMK was included, the left-wing Smer won the elections with a populist and nationalist discourse; it required 25 more seats (out of 150) to secure a majority and thus formed a coalition with two other nationalist parties – HZDS and its traditional ally the SNS. There was no potential coalition excluding nationalistic parties that could reach a majority (the non-extremist parties in the Slovak parliament, including the SMK, gained only 65 seats). UDMR's situation after the 2008 Romanian elections was different. The elections generated a paradoxical result with PSD winning the popular vote but the Democrat Liberals winning more seats in the legislature. The elections came after two years in which UDMR was part of a minority government coalition together with the Liberals. Since the seats gained by UDMR were not useful to any of the first two parties to reach a majority, they agreed to create an oversized coalition government.

Table 4 about here

The UDMR in 2008 is also explained by the following combination: the absence of organizational changes, the absence of a pivotal position, and incumbency (abC), which is associated with five cases. Although the UDMR has always been a junior coalition partner, after this particular election both potential partners blamed UDMR for being part of the massive public expenses incurred by the government for electoral purposes and therefore argued that it should not be included again in the government. A similar situation occurred in 2012 when UDMR was held responsible by the Liberals for the controversial austerity

measures introduced by the government coalition to which it belonged between 2009 and 2012.³⁹ The importance of both the absence of a pivotal position and incumbency is reflected in the fact that these two cases regarding UDMR are also associated with the third combination (bcd).

The second combination abC covers two cases in Bulgaria in the 1994 and the 2009 elections. In 1994, the elections were won by the Socialists (125 out of 240 seats) and they decided to form a government on their own, especially since their victory was seen as a punishment against the previous right-wing coalition in which DPS was a member. In the 2009 election, GERB – considered by DPS as an anti-minority party – fell short of a majority by only three seats, but the party benefited from the support of Ataka MPs. In both elections the winning parties cited the presence of DPS in the previous governing coalition and the dissatisfaction expressed by the electorate towards it.

These first two combinations cover all the cases in which ethnic parties ended up in opposition. The third one (bcd) covers only three cases that have already been explained. An important aspect is the absence of organizational changes (condition A) in both combinations. The absence of leadership changes in ethnic parties is also usually brought up by mainstream politicians when trying to explain why these parties are not included in governing coalitions, similarly to incumbency. However, empirical evidence indicates that such arguments are often only political excuses: in particular contexts some of the parties making the arguments chose to include ethnic parties in government coalitions even though they were incumbent or did not go through organizational changes, e.g. the BSP rejected DPS in 1994 but accepted it in 2005, PDL rejected UDMR in 2008 but accepted it in 2009.

These findings are confirmed when looking at the simple solution formula in Table 5. Five cases are covered by both combinations, while the second (bC) “uniquely” covers only one case (UDMR in 2012). Both the complex and the simple solution formulas complement the results of the necessity analysis, showing that the absence of the pivotal position in a potential coalition that excludes anti-minority parties is necessary for the absence of ethnic parties from governing coalitions. However, it is not sufficient. It always appears in combination with other causal conditions. The analysis of determinants leading to ethnic parties failing to join coalition government strengthened the conclusions reached in the previous section about Hypotheses 1 and 3: there is limited empirical support for both expectations. Organizational change and incumbency at the time of election lead to absence from government coalitions only when they are combined with a non-pivotal role. Finally, we should note the absence from the simple solution formula of the involvement in ethnic tensions prior to the elections (condition D). It was eliminated in the minimization process. By corroborating this observation with the minimal role of this variable in government formation (previous section), we can argue that the involvement in ethnic disputes prior to elections does not seem to make a difference.

Table 5 about here

CONCLUSIONS

This article sets out to identify the causes favoring the presence of ethnic parties in coalition governments in three post-communist countries. Moving beyond single-case or small-N studies, our analysis of 21 elections over 25 years provides useful theoretical and empirical insights. The method used allowed us to test for the combined effect of party and context-related variables and to determine the type of behavior that allows ethnic parties to gain access to coalition governments. The analysis revealed the importance of the pivotal position with respect to the fate of the ethnic parties in the aftermath of parliamentary elections. In

other words, ethnic parties are not included in governments to ensure that the ethnic groups have representation in decision making at the highest level. Instead, where the ethnic parties have not been required to make up the numbers, they have not been included for the sake of political stability.

Our analysis carries two important theoretical and empirical implications. From a theoretical perspective this study is the first comparative analysis to identify a common explanation for the presence in government of ethnic parties from different countries. At the same time, our results show the limited explanatory power of the political continuity dimension. While organizational stability and government incumbency are usually predictors of the post-election fate of mainstream political parties, the ethnic parties follow a different logic. In their case not even the combination of these two variables contributes to their inclusion in government (i.e. when one condition is present the other is absent). This observation indicates that a theoretical framework to explain the presence of ethnic parties in coalition governments should focus on other types of causal conditions than those related to organization and continuity in office. Empirically our analysis confirms a key claim developed particularly in the context of post-communist states. The ethnic parties included in the analysis place little emphasis on ideological affinities and join governing coalitions with basically any party that is not openly and constantly anti-minority. However, they face little political competition within their minority; it is unclear how ethnic parties behave in terms of ideological orientation when there is more than one party constantly gaining seats in the parliament and being part of the dialogue regarding the formation of governing coalitions.

A limitation of this study is the focus on post-communist contexts in post-communist Europe, with their particularities. The study of ethnic minorities and ethnic parties is relevant for other parts of the world as well, such as Western Europe (e.g. Belgium, Switzerland and Spain) or Africa. Moreover, our study deals with “historical” minorities, which have the necessary background for political mobilization, while the ethnic puzzles – especially in Europe – have been significantly changed by recent waves of migration from Eastern Europe, Africa or the Middle East. The types of mobilization of “new” ethnic minorities and their political ambitions are difficult to investigate with such methodological designs. Another limitation of our study is given by the relatively reduced timeframe. Although we look at all elections in Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia since the fall of communism, future elections and governing coalitions, as well as changes in the patterns of representation of ethnic minorities by ethnic parties, could modify the findings of this analysis.

One of the possible avenues for further research is to expand the analysis to include countries such as Estonia or Latvia where the context is also quite different. While in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia there is general acceptance at the level of the ethnic majority that having ethnic parties in the government is a positive aspect – or at least that it does not endanger the stability of the democratic system or of the state as a whole – in Estonia and Latvia, no Russian (or pro-Russian) party has ever been included in a governing coalition, regardless of the post-electoral set-up. The explanations we find for the cases where ethnic parties are left outside the coalitions would probably not hold for these two cases. This shows that we need to explore additional causal conditions in order to improve our capacity to explain the complexity of the inter-ethnic political dynamics at the level of the entire post-communist space. While in Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia the ethnic parties are part of “politics as usual,” there are still countries where the ethnic cleavage remains as salient as two decades ago.

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³⁶ The other three parties that gained seats were the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, the Direction (Smer), and the Communist Party of Slovakia.

³⁷ The results in Table 3 belong to the second stage of minimization where simplifying assumptions were computed. The minimization process included the rows in the truth table that lack an empirical correspondent. The truth table is available online at the following address: <http://fspac.ubbcluj.ro/ethnicismobilization/outcomes/databases/>, last accessed 29 February 2016.

³⁸ One combination of causal conditions (AbcD) with empirical correspondents led to a contradiction. Three cases are associated with this configuration: DPS (1997), UDMR (1996), and SMK (1994). The pivotal position is important to make it into government and its absence is associated with the ethnic parties ending up in opposition. The source of contradiction is UDMR in 1996 because it played no pivotal role but was still included in the coalition. This decision was taken to send a message to the West that the new government (the first without the successors or their allies) is committed to democratic consolidation and reform. This is an isolated case in the post-communist landscape and the other two cases associated with this configuration refer to ethnic parties that were not included in the governing coalition.

³⁹ After both 2008 and 2012 elections UDMR was in opposition for only about a year and joined the government after the broad coalitions disintegrated.

Sergiu Gherghina is Lecturer at the Department of Political Science, Goethe University Frankfurt. He holds a PhD in Political Science from Leiden University. His research interests lie in party politics in Eastern Europe, legislative and voting behavior, democratization, and use of direct democracy. His book on political parties and electoral volatility in post-communist Europe was published by Routledge in 2014. His authored and co-authored works were published in journals such as *American Journal of Political Science*, *Comparative European Politics*, *Democratization*, *East European Politics*, *European Political Science Review*, *European Union Politics*, *International Political Science Review*, *Journal of Legislative Studies*, and *Party Politics*.

George Jigla is Lecturer at the Department of Political Science, Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca. He holds a PhD in Political Science from the same university. His areas of research are ethnic mobilization., political parties, electoral systems, and democratization. His authored and co-authored works were published in journals such as *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Representation*, *Romanian Journal of Political Science*, and *Transition Studies Review*.

Table 1: Results of the Necessity Analysis

Conditions tested	Occurrence of the outcome (S)		Absence of the outcome (s)	
	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage
A	0.500000	0.625000	0.272727	0.375000
a	0.500000	0.384615	0.727273	0.615385
B	0.900000	1.000000	0.000000	0.000000
b	0.100000	0.083333	1.000000	0.916667
C	0.400000	0.400000	0.545455	0.600000
c	0.600000	0.545455	0.454545	0.454545
D	0.600000	0.428571	0.727273	0.571429
d	0.400000	0.571429	0.272727	0.428571

Table 2: The Complex Causal Expressions for the Presence in Government Coalitions

Expression	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	Consistency	Corresponding Cases
ABc	0.40000	0.300000	1.000000	DPS (2001), DPS (2013), Most Hid (2010), SMK (1998)
aBC	0.400000	0.400000	1.000000	DPS (2005), UDMR (2000), UDMR (2004), SMK (2002)
BcD	0.200000	0.100000	1.000000	DPS (1991), SMK (1998)
Solution coverage			0.900000	
Solution consistency			1.000000	

Table 3: The Simple Causal Expressions for the Presence in Government Coalitions

Expression	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	Consistency	Corresponding Cases
B	0.90000	0.900000	1.000000	DPS (2001), DPS (2013), Most Hid (2010), SMK (1998), DPS (2005), UDMR (2000), UDMR (2004), SMK (2002), DPS (1991), SMK (1998)
Solution coverage			0.900000	
Solution consistency			1.000000	

Table 4: The Complex Causal Expressions for the Absence from Government Coalitions

Expression	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	Consistency	Corresponding Cases
abD	0.454545	0.272727	1.000000	DPS (1990), UDMR (1990), UDMR (1992), UDMR (2008), SMK (2006)
abC	0.454545	0.272727	1.000000	DPS (1994), DPS (2009), Most-Hid (2012), UDMR (2008), SMK (2006)
bCD	0.272727	0.090909	1.000000	UDMR (2008), SMK (2006), UDMR (2012)
Solution coverage			0.818182	
Solution consistency			1.000000	

Table 5: The Simple Causal Expressions for the Absence from Government Coalitions

Expression	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	Consistency	Corresponding Cases
Ab	0.727273	0.272727	1.000000	DPS (1990), UDMR (1990), UDMR (1992), UDMR (2008), SMK (2006), DPS (1994), DPS (2009), Most-Hid (2012), UDMR (2008), SMK (2006)
bC	0.545455	0.090909	1.000000	DPS (1994), DPS (2009), Most-Hid (2012), UDMR (2008), SMK (2006), UDMR (2012)
Solution coverage			0.818182	

Solution consistency	1.000000
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Appendix 1: Variable Codebook

Variables (Conditions and Outcome)	Acronym	Values
Organizational or Leadership Changes	A	1: splits, mergers, alliances or leadership changes within the ethnic party prior to the elections 0: no splits, mergers or leadership changes within the ethnic party
Pivotal Position	B	1: the ethnic party holds a pivotal position, according to Banzhaf index, in at least one potential coalition that does not include any anti-minority party 0: the ethnic party does not hold a pivotal position in any potential coalition that does not include anti-minority parties
Incumbency	C	1: the ethnic party was present in the government prior to elections, for more than half of the term 0: the ethnic party was in opposition in the previous term or was in the government for less than half of the term
Involvement of parties in ethnic issues ³⁹	D	1: involvement of the ethnic party in protests, scandals or other forms of public tensions regarding ethnic issues 0: no involvement or moderate opinions
Success in Joining Government Coalitions	S	1: Ethnic party included in the governing coalition formed right after the elections 0: Ethnic party not included in coalition